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ABSTRACT

The question of whether women enrolling in women's colleges are more career-oriented than those enrolling in coeducational colleges was investigated. The study was prompted by earlier work concerning the effects of women's colleges on career success. The 1,818 subjects from generally comparable colleges (five women's and nine coeducational) indicated career importance, according to the Life Style Index, and college selection reasons. Analyses of variance indicate that women enrolling in women's colleges are significantly more career oriented than women enrolling in coeducational colleges and that women's college enrollees give more importance to career-oriented reasons for college choice. (Author/MSE)

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# WHAT TYPE OF COLLEGE DO CAREER-SALIENT WOMEN CHOOSE--

# COEDUCATIONAL OR WOMEN'S?

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# WHAT TYPE OF COLLEGE DO CAREER-SALIENT WOMEN CHOOSE--COEDUCATIONAL OR WOMEN'S?

Linda P. Lentz

Post-secondary education in single-sex colleges was a topic of great debate from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies. Many self-analyses were conducted by women's colleges, men's colleges, and coeducational colleges where proponents of single-sex education and/or coeducation aired their views. By 1975 the debate had ended, but the casualties, or heroes, depending on your point of view, were numerous. Few single-sex institutions of higher education remained.

During this troubled decade the women's colleges were under great pressure to justify their existence. Advocates of these institutions (Cole, 1972; Sandler, 1971; Tompkins, 1972; and Truman, 1970) proclaimed that women's colleges had made a major contribution by providing a supportive environment in which women are free to develop their career potential. They emphasize that at a women's college women are first class citizens; they don't have to compete either with or for men. The absence of men relieves the pressure to follow the traditional female role and, thus, women have a greater potential for fulfilling themselves. Sandler (1971) sees the women's colleges as providing a setting in which women can flourish and develop while examining and reevaluating their lives as women--a place where they can be "deconditioned" from the sex-role stereotypes imposed by society.

With the publication of Tidball's research (1973) the women's colleges found a raison de etre. Tidball contends that women's colleges produce about 2.5 times as many achieving women, on a percentage basis, as do co-educational colleges. She attributes this higher career achievement among women's college graduates to the greater number of faculty female role models, since there are more female faculty members in women's than coeducational colleges.

Might there be other explanations that either supplement or supplant Tidball's theory of why women's colleges produce more achievers than coeducational colleges do? I reviewed the literature on three potentially influential variables which I thought should be considered--impact of colleges, impact of professors as role models, female socialization.

The impact of the college on student interests, attitudes and level of aspiration is small. Researchers (Astin, 1961, 1962a, 1962b; Nichols, 1964; Stern, 1971, and Stobaugh, 1972) have concluded that the output of a college (graduates) is generally a function of the student bodies which enroll. Selective recruitment, whether conscious or unconscious, results in a like-thinking student body whose association over four years produces attitude stabilization rather than attitude change.

The importance of college professors as role models is widely recognized. Stanfield and Schumer (1967) and Weidman (1974) found that undergraduate values were influenced by significant interpersonal contacts with faculty members. The effectiveness of female versus male role models for women was investigated by Husbands (1972), who concluded that there is no hard evidence that women serve as more effective role models than men for women college students.

Socialization effects may explain the differences in women's early career-orientation and future achievement in their careers. Research indicates that the socioeconomic level of a girl's family is an important determiner of career choice (Cross, 1971; Shea, 1971; Standley and Soule, 1974; and Wolshok, 1970) as is the educational level of the girl's father (Werts, 1967). Also related to the development of career-orientation is the amount of perceived parental control and nurturance (Hjelle and Smith, 1975, Kriger, 1972; and Oliver, 1975).

Since women's colleges graduate more achieving women, according to Tidball, and since the pre-college socialization process appears to strongly influence career-orientation it might be expected that women's college enrollees differ from coeducational college enrollees. The research that I carried out was designed to test two aspects of this difference. They can be expressed in two hypotheses: (1) there is a real difference in career salience between women enrolling in women's colleges and women enrolling in coeducational colleges and (2) there is also a real difference in the importance assigned career-oriented reasons for college choice between enrollees in women's colleges and enrollees in coeducational colleges.

## Method

Subjects. The subjects were 1818 freshmen women from five women's colleges and nine coeducational colleges. The colleges from which the subjects were drawn consisted of small, private, liberal-arts institutions located in the northeastern United States. Although some of the colleges maintain their historical denominational affiliations, only those which operated as non-denominational institutions were included in the study.

All of the colleges had a yearly comprehensive fee greater than $3500.00 and offered a similar type of program. The coeducational and women's colleges were chosen to differ systematically in level of admission competitiveness. Table 1 shows the distribution of colleges and subjects for the study.

Table 1

Distribution of Colleges and Subjects

| Type of College | Number of Colleges | Number of Subjects |
|---|---|---|
| Women's Colleges | | |
| Highly Competitive | 0 | 0 |
| Very Competitive | 2 | 371 |
| Competitive | 3 | 306 |
| Coeducational Colleges | | |
| Highly Competitive | 3 | 393 |
| Very Competitive | 3 | 357 |
| Competitive | 3 | 386 |

Instrumentation. The questionnaire used in this research was developed by Shirley Angrist and modified by this researcher. Embedded in the questionnaire used in the present study were 11 dichotomously scored items that Angrist (1971-1972) identified as forming a Life Style Index, a measure of career salience. The Life Style Index served as the dependent variable in testing the first hypothesis.

The questionnaire also contained 26 reasons why a student might have chosen her particular college. The items were rated in importance on a

five-point scale with 1 being "of no importance" to 5 being "of maximum importance". The student's composite score on five of these items, which had been identified as career-oriented reasons for college choice, served as the dependent variable in testing the second hypothesis.

Procedures. Either during freshman orientation or within the first two weeks of college entrance the freshman women in each participating college were requested to respond to the questionnaire on a voluntary basis. An anlaysis of the response rate indicated that 67% of the total sample of freshman women within the 14 colleges responded to the research questionnaire. Sixty-one questionnaires were incomplete, giving a useable response rate of 65%.

Data Analysis. Hypothesis 1 (concerning career salience) was tested first using a two-way least squares analysis of variance to compare coeducational and women's colleges at the competitive and very competitive admission levels. Then a one-way least squares analysis of variance was performed on the coeducational colleges because there was an empty cell at the highly competitive level of women's colleges. In this analysis the independent variable was level of admission competitiveness. Hypothesis 2 was tested using a two-way analysis of variance and a one-way analysis of variance similar to those used to test hypothesis 1. The independent variables remained the same as those in the previous analyses. The student's composite score of career-oriented reasons for choosing her college served as the dependent variable.

Results

Table 2 presents summary data concerning the scores on the Life Style Index and "carreer-oriented reasons for college choice" by college type and competitiveness.

Table 2

Mean Scores on the Dependent Variables
by College Type and Level of Admission Competitiveness

| | Career Salience | | Career-Oriented Reasons for College Choice | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\bar{X}$ | SD | $\bar{X}$ | SD |
| Very Competitive - Women's | 8.22 | 2.18 | 19.30 | 3.49 |
| Competitive - Women's | 7.51 | 2.29 | 18.64 | 3.82 |
| Highly Competitive - Coed | 7.61 | 2.50 | 18.15 | 4.19 |
| Very Competitive - Coed | 7.20 | 2.51 | 18.34 | 4.43 |
| Competitive - Coed | 7.06 | 2.60 | 18.06 | 4.19 |

Hypothesis 1. Results of the two-way analysis of variance strongly support hypothesis 1. Women enrolling in women's colleges are significantly more career salient than women enrolling in coeducational colleges, $F(1,1412) = 34.03$, $p < .001$. There is a significant difference in the career salience of women enrolling in colleges at the competitive and very competitive admission levels, $F(1,1412) = 13.24$, $p < .001$. There is an interaction between level of admission competitiveness and type of college on career salience, $F(1,1412) = 5.20$, $p < .05$. The higher the level of admission competitiveness, the greater is the difference in career salience between the two types of colleges.

The one-way analysis of variance on coeducational colleges shows a significant difference in the career salience of women enrolling in colleges at the three levels of admission competitiveness, $F(1.1139) = 5.04$, $p < .01$.

Dunn's test was used to make six of the possible ten pairwise comparisons among means on the Life Style Index. A significant difference, $p < .01$, was found between the means on career-salience received by enrollees in women's colleges and enrollees in coeducational colleges at the very competitive admission level.

A comparison of the means among levels of admission competitiveness resulted in a significant difference, $p < .01$, in the means received on career salience for women attending women's colleges at the two levels of admission competitiveness. A similar comparison of the means for coeducational colleges showed that there was a significant difference, $p < .01$ between the means for women enrolled in the highly competitive colleges and those enrolled in competitive colleges.

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 was supported. Results of the two-way analysis of variance indicate a significant difference in the weight given to career-oriented reasons for college choice by women enrolling in women's colleges and women enrolling in coeducational institutions, $F(1.1412) = 12.88$, $p < .001$ and in the importance given career-oriented reasons for college choice at the two admission levels, $F(1.1412) = 6.16$, $p < .05$. The one-way analysis of variance on the coeducational colleges at the three levels of admission competitiveness did not verify this difference for the coeducational colleges.

Six pairwise comparisons were made on the "career-oriented reasons for college choice" variable using Dunn's test. The only significant difference obtained was for the comparison of the career-oriented reasons for college choice between enrollees in women's colleges and enrollees in coeducational colleges at the very competitive admission level, $p < .01$.

## Discussion

The results indicate that women entering women's colleges are significantly more career salient than women entering coeducational colleges. Thus, it is possible that this factor may contribute to the future achievement of women's college graduates. In other words, output may partly reflect input.

Results of this study highlight the fact that there are variables other than those dealing with female role models, which may contribute to the greater number of women's-college graduates becoming achievers. The researcher estimated the effect size of career salience for college type using the $w^2$ statistic. The effect between college types on career salience accounts for 2.3% of the variance.

Limitations of the Study. The subjects used in this study were freshmen women from 14 liberal arts colleges (five women's and nine coeducational) located in the northeastern United States. Because a random national sample of first year college women was not used in the study, the results are not generalizable to the entire United States. However, the results are important since the northeastern Uniter States traditionally has been, and still is, the location of many reputable liberal arts colleges, both women's and coeducational.

Another limitation of the study is the fact that the design contained an empty cell--the cell which should have contained women's colleges at the highly competitive level of admissions. The empty cell precluded any comparisons being made with the highly competitive women's colleges and the women's colleges at the other two selectivity levels as well as with the highly competitive coeducational colleges.

The questionnaires were not all administered by the same method nor by the same individual at each participating college. The questionnaire

administration, although carried out differently by the various colleges, included identical instructions and questions for all participants. The major drawback encountered was the inability of the researcher to obtain more detailed information on each subject's responses. A second handicap was the inability to do a follow-up study of the non-respondents. However, as the useable response rate indicates, 65 percent, the voluntary participation of the freshmen women was well above that usually obtained on a mailed questionnaire.

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